BOOKS OF THE WEEK SEEN IN REVIEW AND COMMENT

INTERESTING NEW FICTION COVERING MANY SUBJECTS

A Story of Error and Its Successful Expulsion—Mrs. Rinehart's Story of Musical America.

A. S. M. Hutchinson's Brilliant Study of Insanity—Frank Swinnerton's Picture of English Clerks.

New Fiction by Herman Hagedorn, Flora Annie Steele, Opie Read, Maurice Leblanc and Others.

That love is a curious thing is very readably brought before us in Clara Louise Burnham's story of "The Right Track" (Houghton Mifflin Company). Before the text tells him as much the reader will feel that James Barnes was a man to be both admired and affectionately considered, and since the reader of a novel is bound to take sides he will surely say to himself in this case that Mabel Barnes, whose age was 30 and who was darkly beautiful, was reprehensibly obstinate and provokingly blind in declining to perceive not only the sterling merits but even the romantic magnetism of her husband, James Barnes, aged 50.

A distinctly provoking impression is communicated by the account of Mabel's self-sufficiency. She read books, talked in literary clubs, soared, as she believed, in a superior intellectual atmosphere, an atmosphere not to be invaded by James Barnes. From the first, as we have intimated, the reader will understand that Mabel was obtuse. Several matters are made quite plain in the story. James Barnes was a strong man engaged in highly remunerative commercial pursuits. Mabel was a snob with scales over her beautiful dark eyes. Love is capricious, full of surprises. It was a great change that befell when James took Mabel out to the restaurant to supper. People of distinction came in. All of them knew James. They greeted him with respect, with deference. Mrs. Walmsley was one of them. She was the very distinguished head of a literary club. Mabel's surprise was extreme when Mrs. Walmsley, "seeing Mr. Barnes, stopped short and held out her hand with great cordiality." The reader may think that the change was rather sudden, but he will be glad to find Mabel loving her husband from that illuminating hour.

Just here the story introduces a complication, deferring cleverly the happy issue that seemed to be impending. Mabel now was prepared to expend upon her husband the affection that he deserved, but James too had changed. The chill of Mabel's coldness had extended to his own bosom, and before the incident of the restaurant supper he had made up his mind that he would let his beautiful young wife get a divorce and marry somebody she liked better. The recovery of James Barnes from the extravagance of his earlier feelings for Mabel will occasion in the reader no reproachful sentiment. James had the right as well as the power to be comfortable in the circumstances. Mabel, having come tardily to love her husband, suffered on finding that he did not love her. This too was proper.

The distressing early condition of the Barnes household is interestingly set forth. James Barnes's children by his first wife were not cordial to their young stepmother. They were distinctly rude to her, but we have received the impression that she gave them as good as they sent. Mabel, buried in her books, exchanging "views" at the club, followed her inclination in allowing the kitchen and the nursery to take care of themselves. The cook exercised the powers of a sultana, the French maid indulged her deceitful and spiteful nature uncontrolled. The little stepson, called "Junior," was at once a wreck and a terror—the ghost stories told to him by the French maid at bedtime had shattered his nerves and destroyed the last amiable trait in his disposition. It is startling to find him pinching Mabel so fiercely as to leave black and blue spots.

The coming of Camilla Lovett into this turbulent and unhappy home was a merciful assurance and means of change. Camilla overcame "error" and introduced love. The reader will follow with interest the patient work whereby Camilla accomplished the expulsion of little Junior's devils. The enlightenment and reclamation of Mabel were largely, if not altogether, due to Camilla. To be sure, Junior assisted. We find him boasting in one place: "I did make Mamabel have a good time; she only talked error once." We are not sure that Mabel had quite succeeded in casting out fear, that very insinuating form of error, before she received from her husband a certain tender assurance. All, however, was then well. "They were alone on the piazza now. 'Mabel,' he said, and he no longer smiled. His gray eyes besought the brown ones. 'I've never heard you say you loved me.' 'Dearest,' she answered, 'no one but the trees and the sky and the brook has heard me say it, but I've told them a thousand times that I love you. I love you. I love you.' Gray eyes brimmed and James Barnes pressed grave lips to hers." Junior's high voice was heard singing under the elm tree: "For the angel's name was Love, the angel's name was Love!" and so there was no error at the conclusion.

AMERICAN GIRLS ABROAD

Though the scene of Mary Roberts Rinehart's "The Street of the Seven Stars" (Houghton Mifflin Company) is Vienna and there is enough local color to certify that it is only the Kaiserstadt she has in mind, the people and the conditions she describes will be found in any of the many German towns which possess both a university and a conservatory of music or an art school, and, with some differences, probably in some other foreign places too. Her people belong to the very large class of Americans who have studied in German lands and have brought home pleasant memories of them. The story is simple enough, but Mrs. Rinehart has written it with more care than any of her other books; she tells some pretty blunt truths, and if it is not overinteresting for the general reader it will be fully appreciated by the many persons who have gone through similar experiences.

A young woman with great musical talent but with little money is left alone in Vienna by her girl companions; one is to be married, the other has found out, like so many other girls, that a voice or a talent that will do at home counts for nothing when measured by real musical standards. Then the hero steps in to look after the girl; the reader is at once assured that he is all right and that the girl will come to no harm when told that his name is Peter. He is a doctor and studying in the hospitals, for this is Vienna; most of the other Americans therefore, men and women, are medical students too, and some are making great sacrifices for their education. With the aid of an elderly woman doctor Peter manages to run a household for the three, till a well meaning, gossiping American woman raises such a scandal that the girl runs away and tries to earn her own living. The mischief maker is drawn to the life by Mrs. Rinehart. Everything comes out right in the end, for the hero's name is Peter.

The most delightful thing in the book is the exposition of the musical temperament. The great teacher with whom the girl is studying tells her that she has talent and must go on at any cost. She tells him frankly that she is hard up, but will work as long as she can pay him. He tells her that she must stay and that he will try to let her earn some money. When she has gone he calls his secretary. "The Fraeulein has paid?" he demanded. "Always." "After the lesson?" "Ja, Herr Professor." "It is better," said the master, "that she pay hereafter before the lesson." "Ja, Herr Professor." As many American girls will remember.

The author does not shirk another phase of student life abroad, the temporary domestic arrangements which tempt some Americans. In this case there is a tragic note, for the Viennese girl learns to love her student; but the author does not condone his fault. She takes more stock in a little Bulgarian, who really does not belong in the story at all. It is the American community that she describes and Vienna is only the scene. The reader who has been abroad can shift it easily to Leipzig or Stuttgart or Munich or Berlin.

TWO BRITISH REALISTS.

It takes a modern young writer to pick out a cheerful, inspiring plot as A. M. S. Hutchinson has done in "The Clean Heart" (Little, Brown and Company). His hero is an English journalist and writer of fiction, who has been remarkably successful for a man of his years and whose eccentric behavior is puzzling till we discover that he has been burning the candle at both ends and is about to go crazy. His breakdown is described brilliantly and the horseplay that accompanies it rather adds to the horror. After attempting suicide he escapes into the country and meets an amiable and drunken tramp with whom he wanders about. The tramp is a philosopher who informs the hero that he is too much engrossed in himself, that his disease is self-pity. The madness takes a new form, that of reckless schoolboy pranks in which the hero's lack of all moral sense forces the kindhearted tramp to abstain from drink so as to be able to watch him. Next comes a period when the lunatic must keep going on, and during this his friend gives up his life for him very bravely. The description of the terrors of drowning is elaborate and horrible. A period of comatose quiet follows, in the course of which he does mechanically a kind act, over which he broods. Then he transports himself to a country town where he meets an innocent, unselfish girl of the lower classes, who induces him to try to do things for other people. The parrotlike phrases put in her mouth are very annoying. After a while the hero finds he cannot do without her and endeavors to make her live with him without marriage. As she is about to decline they slip on the edge of a cliff and she lets herself drop so as to save him. That opens his eyes to the need of being unselfish and apparently restores his sanity, for he had been a decent, self-sacrificing fellow before his breakdown. He resumes his place in society and devotes himself to the girl whom the fall has made a helpless cripple. The study of insanity is brilliant; the moral is faultless. The story may seem humorous and sarcastic to those whose taste is properly developed; it will weigh like a nightmare on most readers.

Though Frank Swinnerton, author of "On the Staircase" (George H. Doran Company), is announced as a promising realist, in this tale the realism is restricted to the accurate topography of London, for the people are ideal. Those who have most to do in it are English lawyers' clerks and typewriters, yet they are well read in the literature and philosophy of the day and have correct taste in art and in music; they even have parties that are very much like French salons. One sagacious young man is so uniformly brilliant in his remarks that the wilful young woman may be pardoned for calling him a bore. The disturbing element in the story is a shy, high strung and incompetent lawyer's clerk, whose imagination leads him to marry his landlady's daughter, a pretty, affectionate, but ignorant and plebeian girl. After discovering that they have nothing in common intellectuality he proceeds to imagine himself in love with another girl; his friends try to help him, but he prefers to commit suicide, thereby providing a subject for discussion for the bore and the girl he loves. The author wastes more time than is necessary over the morbid youth. His other people are pleasant and amusing, after the reader has forgotten the station in life to which they have been assigned by the author. They argue good naturedly about woman suffrage, about woman's dependence and other subjects; they do nice things and they marry as they should. It is difficult to see how Mr. Swinnerton's realism differs from plain fiction. There is nothing of Zola in his staircase; it does not impress itself on the characters or the reader in any way. It merely serves the purposes for which ordinary staircases are constructed.

SOME NEW FICTION.

Two capital portraits are drawn by Herman Hagedorn in "Faces in the Dawn" (Macmillans). One is the gruff, domineering German pastor in his relations to his meek wife. He is a domestic tyrant, but he represents pretty fairly the German idea of what a husband should be to his wife; an idea which American girls contemplating marriage with Germans ought to know at least. The pastor's admiration for his squire's daughter is more fanciful and his domestic reform still more so; the disreputable episode in his past is not needed. The other portrait is the selfish, indolent mother who bends every one to her will; the author's delight in her makes the long drawn out conversations enjoyable. His heroine is too thoroughly Americanized for a German girl and his American with no knowledge of the language takes too readily to German ways; it might have been more artistic to have kept the two nationalities apart. But there are pretty and true scenes in the story and we hope Mr. Hagedorn will make more experiments in prose.

Two dozen Indian tales by Flora Annie Steele are included in "The Mercy of the Lord" (George H. Doran Company). The best are those in which terror or the supernatural is the theme, the least effective, perhaps, those in which the author tries humor. A few rise above the level of magazine stories. Mrs. Steele's tales are always interesting and her best is very good, but it is no kindness to her to invite comparison with Mr. Kipling.

A charming heroine will carry the reader through B. M. Bower's "The Ranch at the Wolverine" (Little, Brown and Company), an arrangement of Wild West episodes such as we have come to expect from the author. At the start it promises to be something better, for the old frontierswoman has character; we see too little of her till the end, which is effectively tragic. The hero is satisfactory, but the villainy is rather commonplace. The girl is worth knowing.

A pleasant love story of the old fashioned kind is told by B. M. Croker in "Lismoyle" (Brentano's). A rich girl, run down by society pleasures, accepts an invitation to Ireland in the hope of recuperating her health. She finds she is not expected, meets some queer adventures, is thrown in with a ruined Irishman who is trying to save his estate, falls in love with him, leads the simple life, recovers her health and marries her lover. There are several interesting persons in the book, some bright talk, some unexpected situations, an astonishingly rattle brained widow and enough action to hold the attention to the end.

The sorrows of an unfortunate family on a farm are related by Sheila Kaye-Smith in "The Three Furlongers" (J. B. Lippincott Company). One brother has the artistic temperament; his efforts to get rich quickly land him in jail and sour his disposition, but he develops talent for the violin and after a disappointment in love seems to have a future before him. The sister has a temperament too; she yields to an unworthy lover, but her brothers take care of her. The other brother, who looks after the rest, dies. The three hold to each other; they have character and suffer. We hear much more of the weak creature, who after deserting the sister wins the young girl her brother cared for. These two prosper apparently. There is much suppressed emotion in the book, but what it is about we fail to see.

A band of anarchists pick out one of their number to murder a hateful capitalist. He is turned from his purpose by the capitalist's small grandson, enters his employ, shows great business capacity and prepares to resist his former associates. So far we have exciting melodrama. The reformed criminal, however, had been a bad actor, and in consequence after the start in Opie Read's "The New Mr. Howerson" (the Reilly and Britton Company, Chicago) we are asked to listen to actor's jargon on whatever passes through the author's mind for pages without end.

One story alone fills John T. McIntyre's "Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective" (The Penn Publishing Company, Philadelphia). That gentleman's able assistant keeps the reader busy with an intangible mystery, leads him to suspect the inmates of a Rhenish castle on the Hudson and the invalid guests at a hotel near by, while the great detective employs his powers of intuition. He naturally demonstrates that every one has been on a false track, but after working up much excitement the mystery and the solution seem rather tame.

In the new Arsene Lupin volume "The Teeth of the Tiger" (Doubleday, Page and Company) Maurice Leblanc also limits himself to a single crime, and his translator, Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, refrains from referring in notes to previous Lupin exploits. That gentleman after being dead for a while has come to life again, as he explains to several persons. This time he acts as a detective and has to contend with the natural and widespread suspicion that he is a criminal besides the efforts of many bunglers to bring him to justice for previous crimes. He keeps the reader busy in following him and in guessing why he jumps from one inspiration to another. In short, this is another of the old time Lupin tales written with the author's former spirit.

The rottenness of London society life impresses Dion Clayton Calthrop, and in consequence he writes "Clay and Rainbows" (Frederick A. Stokes Company). The clay is the women, all vicious and frivolous, and all who are married caring for other men than their husbands; the rainbows are the ideals in the men, all of whom, however inane or idle, have them. The story itself is the tragedy of a nice young fellow who has fallen in love with a born flirt; another girl like her winds up in a lunatic asylum. He is driven to the contemplative life in the mountains because he must fight against consumption and is made miserable three times by the girl's intrusion. The end solves nothing. The author never develops the hero's feelings beyond the callow stages and never allows the girl to act like a human being. Here as in other books he is successful in light and airy passages and appreciates the scenery he has looked upon. His problem makes little impression, for his arguments are either not sincere or extremely juvenile.

TWO POINTS OF VIEW OF WAR.

The two elements which constitute war—the men who plot and plan but do not fight, and the men who fight but have no say in the matter—are vividly and contrastingly portrayed in Alfred Noyes's Poem "The Wine Press."

Here are the men who reckoned the cost of war "in little disks of gold":

Around a shining table sat
Five men in black tail coats;
And what their sin was none could say:
For each was honest, after his way
(Though there are sheep, and armament firms,
With all that this "connotes").

One was the friend of a merchant prince,
One was the foe of a priest,
One had a brother whose heart was set
On a gold star and an epaulette,
And—where the rotten carcase lies
The vultures flock to feast.

But—each was honest after his way,
Lukewarm in faith, and old;
And blood, to them, was only a word,
And the point of a phrase their only sword,
And the cost of the war, they reckoned it
In little discs of gold.

They were cleanly groomed. They were not to be bought.
And their cigars were good.
But they had pulled so many strings
In the tinselled puppet show of kings
That when they talked of war they thought
Of sawdust, not of blood;

Not of the crimson tempest
Where the shattered city falls;
They thought, behind their varnished doors,
Of diplomats, ambassadors
Budgets and loans and boundary lines,
Coercions and recalls;

Forces and Balances of Power;
Shadows and dreams and dust;
And how to set their bond aside,
And prove they lied not when they lied,
And which was weak, and which was strong,
But—never which was just.

. . . So might is right,
And reason wins the day.
And if, at a touch on a silver bell
They plunged three nations into hell
The blood of peasants is not red
A hundred miles away.

Here is a picture of the other side, from the same poem:

The troop train couplings clanged like Fate
Above the bugles' din.
Sweating beneath their haversacks,
With rifles bristling on their backs,
Like heavy footed oxen
The dusty men trooped in.

It seemed that some gigantic hand
Behind the veils of sky
Was driving, herding all these men
Like cattle into a cattle pen,
So few of them could understand,
So many of them must die. . . .

"I left my wife a month's pay,"
A voice droned at his side.
"This war, they say, will last a year.
God knows what will become of her,
With three to feed." "Ah, that's the way
In war," Johann replied.

"They say that war's a noble thing:
They say it's good to die
For causes none can understand:
They say it's for the Fatherland:
They say it's for the Flag, the King,
And none must question why!"

The train shrieked into a tunnel.
"Duty? Yes, that is good.
But when the thing has grown so vast
That no man knows, from first to last,
The reason why he finds himself
Up to his neck in blood;

"When you are lifted up like this
Between a finger and thumb,
And dropped you don't know where or why,
And told to shoot and butcher and die,
And not to question, not to reply,
But go like a sheep to the shearers,
A lamb to the slaughter, dumb;

What? Are the engines, then, our God?
Does one among you know
The reason of this bitter work?"